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ABSTRACT

Interest in the American Indian in West Germany is high. Romantic notions, derived from the novels of 19th century German writer Karl May and American westerns shown on German television, combined with a subtle anti-Americanism might be responsible for the American Indian Movement (AIM) support groups that have been forming among students and bringing American Indian issues into the arena of world affairs. While this enthusiasm for AIM among students has not generally been shared by academicians, recent scholarly interdisciplinary research in American Indian Studies has been conducted by anthropologists associated with the Center for North American Studies (ZENAF) at the University of Frankfurt. The topic of ethnic identity and cultural resistance has produced several case studies on cultural change and has stimulated an evaluation of fiction written by Native Americans in the context of a struggle for ethnic identity. The scholarly evaluation of AIM in the context of the long history of Indian resistance has also begun. Citations for 26 ZENAF publications on American Indian Studies (most written in German) are provided. (NEC)

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American Indian Studies in West Germany

H. Guillermo Bartelt

Author's note: This essay was written while I was a Fulbright Scholar in West Germany 1985/86. I wish to express my thanks to Bernd Peyer and Peter Bolz for making available to me some of the German work on American Indian Studies which is commented on here.

Interest in the American Indian in West Germany is high, and the book stores respond to the demand by making available a great variety of popular literature, especially in the form of translations of Anglo-American publications. The images which Germans seem to have of the American Indian are probably derived from the novels of the 19th Century writer Karl May (1842–1912), who had never set foot on American soil and who produced most of his works while serving several prison sentences for grand larceny. His adventure stories portrayed noble savage images set in a world of good and evil, and continue to provide one of the greatest sources which contribute to the interest in Native Americans in Germany today.

Many Germans know American Indians only as Nineteenth Century novel images.

These romantic notions, reinforced perhaps by the American Westerns shown on German television and combined with a subtle anti-Americanism might be responsible for the great amount of attention that Pan-Indianism seems to have received in West Germany. Especially those individuals who regard the American Indian issue as a show case of the failure of American "imperialism." Understandably, to many Germans Pan-Indianism seems to be synonymous with AIM since media coverage of the 1972 Trail of Broken Treaties and the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee apparently left the impression that Indians were united in their support for AIM. This idea was probably strengthened by appearances in Germany as well as other European countries by such AIM spokesmen as Clyde Bellecourt and by other AIM activities directed specifically to international publicity and the creation of outside pressure against the American government, such as appearances before the UN in Switzerland. As a result:

> For many, the AIM "Warrior" personifies all living Indians ... a primitivistic symbol of resistance against the system, in this case U.S. capitalism. Images of Geronimo and Sitting Bull were posted up alongside with Che Guevara and the AIM "Warrior" became their immediate reincarnation. (Peyer, in press.)

As early as 1975, an AIM representative office was established in West Berlin, and soon after AIM support groups could be found in many parts of Germany and other German-speaking countries. Among the more persistent of such support groups are the *Gesellschaft für Bedrohte Völker* (Society

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for Endangered Peoples) and the *International Committee for the Indians of the Americas* (Incomindios). These as well as other smaller groups publish several magazines and pamphlets, some regularly, others sporadically distributed primarily among German university students, who seem to especially exhibit an appeal to the persistent German tradition of romantic naturalism in regard to Indians, colored by an underlying anti-Americanism, which has a solid tradition since the Vietnam War era.

AIM support groups have been forming in German-speaking countries within the tradition of romantic naturalism and the anti-American feeling that has developed since the Vietnam Conflict.

This enthusiasm for AIM among students, however, has not been shared by academicians, such as cultural anthropologists, who have chosen the study of American Indians as their ethnographic or archaeological specialty. Limiting their scope to conventional anthropological topics (generally ethnology), most German academicians have remained aloof in regard to the welcome mat that has been spread for AIM. Consequently, it has been advocated by at least one academician, anthropologist Bernd Peyer, that serious academic consideration of the subject is sorely needed because avoiding a scholarly confrontation of the subject will promote the mystification of AIM in Germany even further.

Peyer has attempted to clear up some of the misconceptions prevalent in Germany surrounding Indian activism. First, he points out that Pan-Indian strategies for resistance are much older than the American Indian Conference held in Chicago in 1961; nevertheless, many works read in Germany regard that event as the birth of Pan-Indianism. Among such older strategies, Peyer lists the Society of American Indians, which promoted civil rights from 1911 to 1920 and the National Congress of American Indians which was founded in 1944. He points out the participation in political activities, such as the Trail of Broken Treaties, of several other key organizations such as the National Indian Brotherhood, the Native American Rights Fund, the National Indian Youth Council and the National Council on Indian Work. however, Peyer does admit the effectiveness of AIM in establishing connections abroad and in bringing Indian issues into world affairs. Second, Peyer explains that AIM cannot make the claim of representing all Indians since in some areas of the United States the organization has not been able to get off the ground. Third, AIM members, claims Peyer, come from many different Indian communities—both urban and rural—with various degrees of acculturation, but all are socialized into a Plains-derived model focusing on the Sioux Sun Dance. As a result, other factions among the Sioux have dissociated themselves from the AIM-dominated Sun Dance and have started alternative annual events. Finally, Peyer emphasizes that first conceived as a movement, AIM has become identified with certain personalities often cited by the media in order to satisfy the Euro-American need for the personification of historical processes with mythical leaders.

These groups have brought American Indian issues into the arena of world affairs.

Peyer is one of several anthropologists attached to the *Zentrum für Nordamerika Forschung* (ZENAF) (Center for North American Studies). Though the focus of ZENAF is not necessarily on Indians, a group of scholars has cooperated in producing interdisciplinary research on Indian literature, art, education, land and water rights, cultural identity and cultural resistance. The last two topics have been the subject of a project financed by the Volkswagen Foundation from 1980 until 1984 entitled "Acculturation

and Ethnic Identity: Resistance and Self-Determination Among the Indian Minorities of North America." Various aspects of the project are reported in anthropological journals and essay collections; in addition, a dissertation by Peter Bolz (1986) reports on several case studies which generally attempt to determine the patterns of Indian efforts to preserve cultural autonomy and to resist Anglo-American pressures.

Bolz traces the historical development of the Pine Ridge Sioux Reservation culture and presents a criticism of the concept of acculturation as a forced adaptation to Euro-American civilization and, therefore, a negative factor in the cultural development of the Oglala. During several periods of field work in South Dakota, Bolz observed that people in Pine Ridge seem to be deliberately selecting those aspects of Anglo-American culture which they perceive to be of benefit to themselves. An example of that process, according to Bolz, is the increasing Indian control over their own educational systems. Whereas formal education was once used by Whites to alienate the Oglala from their traditional culture, it is now used by Indians themselves as a vehicle for the strengthening and revival of such values. As a showcase of such initiatives, Bolz points out the establishment of the Oglala Lakota College, which in its curriculum tries to transmit biculturalism and which seems to enjoy the support of all reservation factions. Among other factors that appear to be strengthening the continuity of traditional values are kinship generosity, the Pow Wow, the Give-a-way, and the revival of the Sun Dance, according to Bolz. The continuity of these values also implies to Bolz an ethnic boundary which makes possible not only further developments in traditional culture but also adaptations to modern realities.

Education was once used to alienate Indians from their traditional culture; now it serves as a vehicle to revive and strengthen these traditions.

Other research activities in the ZENAF project have concentrated on Indian literature for an analysis of ethnic identity. For example, Peyer, since the publication of his dissertation (1979) on fiction and anthropology in the Native American novel, has continued to trace the development and reception of Indian-authored fiction. His focus has been on the role of Hyemeyohsts Storm's *Seven Arrows* in Native American literature and the controversy surrounding that work. Peyer maintains that fiction can be a legitimate source for ethnographic data since writers such as Grinnell, LaFarge, and Radin have extensively relied on ethnography for their works. However, fiction in its freedom to define possible realities, Peyer points out, can be selective about the type and quantity of such data. For that reason, Peyer claims, anthropology has largely misunderstood Storm's novel. By excessively scrutinizing ethnographic details, according to Peyer, critics such as the Cheyenne expert John Moore have failed to recognize the work for what it really is, namely fiction. Peyer interprets the problem in misunderstanding *Seven Arrows* in terms of an author trying to shorten the gap between tradition and a contemporary art form. As far as Peyer is concerned, Storm's motivation was not to disclose or modify the mysteries of the Cheyenne; instead, he merely took some elements from the Plains cultural tradition and reworked them into a contemporary statement on peace and brotherhood. Peyer supports his perspective with quotes from such well known Indian spokesmen as Vine Deloria:

> What we have in *Seven Arrows*, therefore, is a statement about the universe and an intense effort to illustrate how that statement validates itself in the

continual reintegration of experiences of a community of people. (Peyer, 1979)

In general, Peyer sees Native American fiction as a product of a continuous struggle for an ethnic identity. in the course of this struggle, Indians are making use of the printed word and other forms of mass media in order to break a cultural monopoly by White authors. Hence, Indian-authored fiction forms part of Pan-Indianism, according to Peyer, and the use of the English language is serving as a vehicle for intertribal communication.

To sum up, recent scholarly interdisciplinary research in American Indian Studies in West Germany has been made possible in large part through the efforts of a number of anthropologists associated with ZENAF at the University of Frankfurt. The topic of ethnic identity and cultural resistance has produced several case studies on cultural change and has stimulated an evaluation of fiction written by Native Americans in the context of a struggle for ethnic identity. An interesting side line is the call for a scholarly evaluation of AIM in the context of the long history of Indian resistance.

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